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### **C.C. Pecknold, Transforming Postliberal Theology: George Lindbeck, Pragmatism and Scripture**

**Citation for published version:**

Grumett, D 2007, 'C.C. Pecknold, Transforming Postliberal Theology: George Lindbeck, Pragmatism and Scripture', *Theology*, vol. 110, no. 853, pp. 49-50. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571X0711085314>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1177/0040571X0711085314](https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571X0711085314)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Theology

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**Transforming Postliberal Theology: George Lindbeck, Pragmatism and Scripture, C.C. Pecknold** (T&T Clark 2005), xiii+166pp., \$110/£55 hbk., \$33.95/£19.99 pbk.

This book provides an accessible yet thought-provoking introduction to current scholarly debates about how scripture should be read and acted on. These are matters of great importance for church order, mission, ecumenism and interfaith relations. Fluent and responsible work like this needs to be read and absorbed by as many practitioners as possible.

Chad Pecknold begins with George Lindbeck, presenting him convincingly as a scriptural pragmatist in critical conversation with liberal theology. Lindbeck eschews the classic liberal concern with ‘universal’ experience in favour of ‘descriptions of concrete “particular” experience as *mediated* through cultural-linguistic signs’ (p. 6). Concepts and doctrines are then assessed ‘in terms of their effects or consequences in life’ (p. 25).

The discussion moves on to advocate recovery of an Augustinian semiotic universe filled with signs whose meaning is understood via scripture and theology in a ‘semiotic repair of the world’. Scripture is, for Augustine, not an end in itself but a ‘scaffold’ to ‘help us discover ... the true inexhaustible meaning of what the scriptures signify for us’ (p. 54). Many different interpretations are possible so long as they don’t contradict the ‘rule of faith’, which is the law of love (p. 58). This is not a dissolution of fact in allegory, but a drawing out and intensification of the significance of the facts presented.

The third member of the trio presented is the Jewish thinker Peter Ochs, whose work inspired by the logician Charles Peirce has been foundational to the ‘scriptural reasoning’ movement. A pragmatic approach to reading scripture here comes to the fore, based on Peirce’s distinction between A- and B-reasonings. B-reasoning is concerned with the plain sense of scripture and often in error, whilst A-reasoning seeks to discern scripture’s deeper spiritual sense and significance. This process derives from a ‘revealed logic’ or ‘theo-logic’, which I would suggest has some intriguing parallels with a neo-Thomist conception of reason. A-reasoning can be mapped with a diagram, although signs display their full meaning not on paper but in their users’ behaviour.

Postliberal theology is identified in passing as an Anglo-American version of *nouvelle théologie*. Are these therefore issues with which modern Catholic theology began to engage first? Some instructive comparisons can certainly be made with the work of Henri de Lubac, especially his accessible collection *Scripture in the Tradition*. De Lubac sees the spiritual and literal senses as complementary: the spiritual sense completes the literal, while the literal provides the indispensable foundation of the spiritual. The two are indeed ultimately one. Fragmentation of the senses is effected by human intellect rather than being a property of scripture itself. This can be illustrated with a eucharistic analogy: just as Christ is revealed in the breaking of bread, so the breaking up of scripture into separate senses assists Christ’s revelation of himself to human understanding in the Word. It is only by means of the breaking that sacramental unity may be attained in Church and world.

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